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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply “carrying on the fight,” but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

**Submission guidelines**

Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: [review\\_editor@platypus1917.org](mailto:review_editor@platypus1917.org). All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

**The *Platypus Review* is funded by:**

The University of Chicago Student Government  
Dalhousie Student Union  
Loyola University of Chicago  
School of the Art Institute of Chicago Student Government  
The New School  
New York University  
The University of Illinois at Chicago  
The Platypus Affiliated Society

The Platypus Review

Issue #140 | October 2021



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The sexual needs find substitute gratifications of freedom, in a word, reactionary thinking.” sexual needs: “The result is conservatism, fear against the suppression of both material and ity from consciousness and prevents rebellion turns into a moral defense, withdraws sexual-labour under capitalism. Sexual repression the specific form of the exploitation of human ity, and in particular its thriving as a result of there was a history to the repression of sexual- to forgo pleasure and go to work, but for Reich cultural civilization to exist, that is for humans thought that repression is necessary for all of incorporation of that external prohibition. Freud disturbances of the mind. (4) Morality is the thus manifest all the stronger in pathological ity is repressed out of fear of punishment and from infancy onward; (3) Childhood sexual-control of the Third International. (2) Sexuality is the prime motor of psychic life which are not accessible to conscious control; Consciousness is driven by psychic processes ighted the following of Freud’s discoveries: (1) labor and the family in capitalism. Reich high- of the pathologies produced by the crisis historical nature of subjectivity, and particularly appropriation because of his recognition of the Freud’s work could lend itself to a Marxist control of the Third International. Russian party bureaucrats helped Stalin take hands of the pre-fascist Freikorps, and when ended when the SPD in power in Germany com-manded the murder of Rosa Luxemburg at the indicators of the possibility for revolution. This the party, the proletariat, and capitalism, and as Luxemburg as an index of the transformation of ic Labour Party, were treated by Lenin and Rosa and Bolsheviks in the Russian Social Democrat-between reform and revolution, or Mensheviks SPD (Social Democratic Party) on the relation revisionist and orthodox Marxists in the German action. Controversies, whether they opposed in order to guide the masses in revolutionary broadly of the contradictions of capitalism, understanding of its contradictions, and more and, for and through the organization, an both the organization of proletarian civil society they have become today, but were tasked with tional were not the mere marketing agencies Indeed, the Marxist parties of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Interna-in its wake a disorganized mass of individuals. transformed society, and its disintegration left tivity and objectivity, but also because the party sion of the dialectical relations between subjec-meant to be the very medium for the apprehen-two reasons: first because the party was itself ist party made psychoanalysis necessary for More specifically, the absence of a social-dissmissal of the workers’ support for fascism. Psychoanalysis was to go beyond such facile as “psychotic” or “chauvinistic.” Instead of analysing that contradiction, intellec-tuals pathologized the working class response

of orthodox Marxism, not to its replacement or complementation with a heterogeneous theory, and certainly not to the pathologization of Nazi voters or to their authoritarianism. The Frankfurt School more broadly understood fascism to be only one form of the authoritarian state, with the New Deal welfare state and the USSR embodying other forms of the same, and relying just as much on the authoritarian personality. Contemporary attempts at mobilizing “author-tarianism” and “the authoritarian personality” must contend with the widespread nature both among leaders and movements they might con-sider “left-wing” as well as with the diminished plausibility of psychoanalysis as the bourgeois society which produced the Freudian individual has largely disintegrated.

Why did orthodox Marxists such as Reich, Benjamin or Adorno use concepts inherited from Freudian psychoanalysis? We should remember that similar attempts were roundly criticized by Lenin only a decade prior: “The ex-tension of Freudian hypotheses seems ‘educat-ed’, even scientific, but it is ignorant, bungling [..]. There is no place for it in the Party, in the class-conscious, fighting proletariat.” Yet far from being a heretical move to correct Marxism or complement its understanding of material conditions with a science of subjectivity, the text of the practical disappearance of the party meant by Reich as a return to Marx in the con-Introduction of psychoanalysis into theory was introduction of psychoanalysis into theory was conditions with a science of subjectivity, the text of the practical disappearance of the party meant by Reich as a return to Marx in the con-Introduction of psychoanalysis into theory was moreover written and published as fascism and Nazism were still taking shape, Reich’s work can illuminate, if not our present situation, at least the necessities, possibilities and limits of psychoanalysis when faced with a phenomenon like fascism.

In what follows I try to answer the follow-ing questions: Why did Reich believe it both possible and necessary to mobilize Freudian concepts to understand the rise of Nazism in Germany? What did he perceive to be the limits or mistakes this might involve? What character-ized this mass psychology of fascism? What did the Frankfurt School mean by authoritarianism beyond the mere phenomenon of fascism? What might this mean for contemporary attempts to mobilize psychoanalysis in order to understand phenomena such as Trump or Brexit?

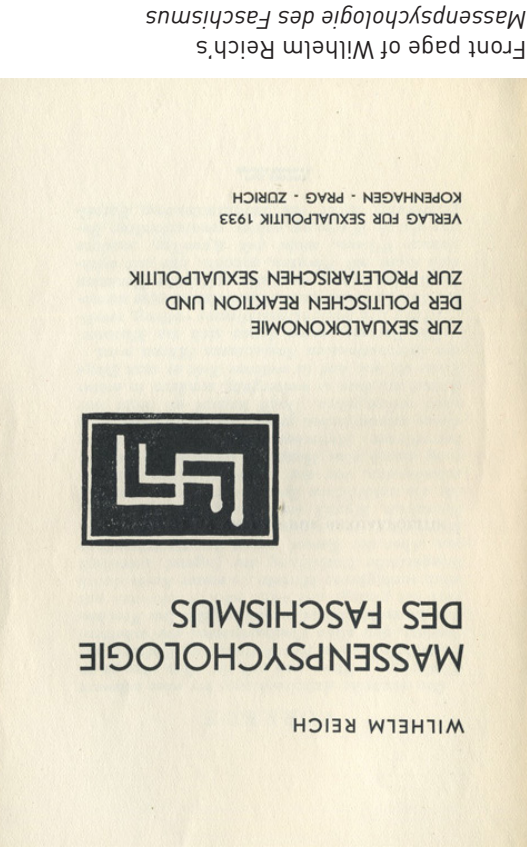
In brief: For Reich it is the disintegration of the Marxist party from 1914 onwards which makes it both possible and necessary to rely on Freudian concepts in order first of all to un-derstand the workers’ authoritarian personality structure which had led to that disintegration in the first place. Yet such a use of Freudian concepts should properly lead to a rediscovery

Two questions lay behind this renewed interest: Are Trump and Brexit contemporary manifesta-tions of what Adorno called “the authoritarian personality”? What role can Frankfurt School style critical theory play in making sense of these phenomena?

Orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis plays an important role in Adorno’s concept of the authoritarian personality. As Adorno put it, “Our whole study, though its subject-matter falls into the area of social psychology, is in full har-mony with psychoanalysis in its more orthodox, Freudian version. On theoretical grounds, our group opposed the attempts to ‘sociologize’ psychoanalysis through the softening of basic concepts” — in opposition to the revisionism of Erich Fromm, which Adorno had repeat-edly criticized. As Peter Gordon clarifies, more than Freud directly, the early Frankfurt School drew inspiration from Wilhelm Reich’s “Char-acter Analysis,” and particularly from his *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, which he published in 1933.<sup>2</sup> Yet very little attention has been paid to that work over the past few years,<sup>3</sup> in spite of the re-edition of Reich’s early writings a few years earlier. As perhaps the first full-length work dedicated to the study of fascism writ-ten by a practicing Marxist psychoanalyst, moreover written and published as fascism and Nazism were still taking shape, Reich’s work can illuminate, if not our present situation, at least the necessities, possibilities and limits of psychoanalysis when faced with a phenomenon like fascism.

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THE CRISIS OF NEOLIBERALISM, manifested in 2016 with both the election of Trump as U.S. President and the Brexit vote, has sparked a renewed interest in authoritarianism and the Frankfurt School’s concept of the authorit-ian personality. It has led to the re-edition in Adorno co-wrote, as well as of his conference entitled, “Aspects of the New Right Extremism” in 2020. It has also sparked various commen-taries and attempts at actualizing Adorno’s ar-gument, such as the 2018 volume entitled *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*, with essays by Wendy Brown and Peter Gordon and Max Pensky. The *Platypus Review* has itself published for the first time Adorno’s “Remarks on the Authoritarian Personality” as well as commentaries in November 2016 and a slender volume, *Marxism in the Age of Trump*, that also addresses the question of the authoritarian personality. The conference by Copenhagen-based organisation Probleme, to which this text was originally responding to, asked, “What can psychoanalysis say about the far-right?” in Sep-tember 2020, was a late example of that trend.



Victor Cova

understand fascism

On the Marxist use of psychoanalysis to



“On the Marxist use of psychoanalysis,” cont.  
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in brutal sadism and in masochism, in the counter girl’s sexual desire for marching officers and in the young men’s joining the army to “travel to foreign countries.”

According to Marx, the crisis of labor, which also manifests as an excessive repression of sexuality, expresses the core contradiction of bourgeois society under the industrial mode of production. Bourgeois society was based on the free exchange of labor, and more particularly on the value of labor time. The development of bourgeois society had deprived European nobility from much of its power, yet continued to live under its laws. For Adam Smith, such a society would guarantee ever greater wealth for all for ever less effort as labor became more efficient. Yet with the industrial revolution, the automatization of labor rendered its value self-contradictory. Indeed, the workers made the machines that would replace them, actively destroying the value of their own labor as they worked, leading to both overwork and underwork, that is, mass unemployment, but also to economic crises that periodically disrupted social life.<sup>7</sup>

For Marx, socialism and Bonapartism were the political manifestations of this crisis of labor. The revolution of 1848 was the political manifestation of an economic crisis. The call for socialism that emerged at that time expressed the increased socialization of production, but missed its self-contradictory nature and only demanded the full realization of the value of labor. The election of a socialist, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, showed the impasse of such a demand. He managed the crisis by alternately supporting different sectors of society, now the unemployed, now the petty bourgeoisie, now the peasants, all the while increasing the power of the state over society through the police and the army to repress discontent and employ the lumpen proletariat. His crowning himself emperor in order to protect universal suffrage and democracy fully expressed the self-contradictory nature of bourgeois society under capitalism. For Marx, this did not mean that the bourgeois revolutions had been hypocritical or delusional, but rather that their success had produced the potential for heretofore unimaginable forms of freedom. It was this unfulfilled potential which expressed itself as political repression.<sup>8</sup>

More specifically, both the potential of industrial production and its repression were the responsibility of the workers. They made both the machine and the revolution, and they gave up on both by choosing for themselves a master, shying away from the overcoming of capitalism and unable to learn from their failure. What was needed, then, was an organization dedicated to maintaining a consciousness of history and of articulating the self-contradictory relations between labor and capital, the realization of class and its overcoming. The first step such an organization would take would be to carry out the revolution to its term, and not to abandon power to the bourgeoisie. Authoritarianism, though a symptom of the self-contradictory nature of bourgeois society under the industrial mode of production, was not to be avoided but worked through. As Engels put it:

Why do the anti-authoritarians not confine themselves to crying out against political authority, the state? All Socialists are agreed that the political state, and with it political authority, will disappear as a result of the coming social revolution, that is, that public functions will lose their political character and will be transformed into the simple administrative functions of watching over the true interests of society. But the anti-authoritarians demand that the political state be abolished at one stroke, even before the social conditions that gave birth to it have been destroyed. They demand that the first act of the social revolution shall be the abolition of authority. Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionists. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day if it had not made use of this authority of the armed people against the bourgeois? Should we not, on the contrary, reproach it for not having used it freely enough?<sup>9</sup>

Hence for Reich fascism should be understood on the basis of Marxism, should rely on psychoanalysis because of the failure of the party, and serves to discover the emancipatory potential of fascism, that is, the worker’s desire for freedom which fascism both expressed and recoiled from — in the same way as neurosis, for Freud, expresses both a desire for [sexual] freedom and its repression. Reich takes the example of rebelling soldiers during the 1905 Russian revolution, who, having successfully risen up against their immediate commanders, capitulated before the rest of the hierarchy and gave themselves up for slaughter. As he puts it, “In their officers the soldiers of 1905 unconsciously perceived their childhood fathers (condensed in the conception of God) who denied sexuality and whom one could neither kill nor want to kill, though they shattered one’s joy of life. Both their repentance and their irresolution subsequent to the seizure of power were an expression of its opposite, hate transformed into pity, which as such could not be translated into action.” Another example he takes, which for him signalled the end of revolutionary Marxism, was the embrace by the workers of the 1914 war which alone could make possible the carnage that followed.

The Frankfurt School expanded on Reich’s insights and generalized them beyond the special case of fascism. For them, the authoritarian state described more broadly the different regressive (i.e., barbaric) state forms that emerged in response to the crisis of 1929.

As with Marx, Kautsky, and Rosa Luxemburg, the choice that had been posed was between an intensification of barbarism, or the transition to socialism. The restructuring of capitalism after 1929 took the form of a liquidation of liberalism and its replacement with the authoritarian state — as fascism in Italy and Germany, central planning in the USSR, or the welfare state in Western Europe and the U.S.<sup>10</sup> The authoritarian state was marked by a regression to neo-feudal relations of domination yet in a hyper-modern form that mimicked the industrial process.

This raised questions concerning the possibility for psychoanalysis to continue making sense as a critical analytic in this brave new world. As Adorno put it, the administered society is that in which the proletarian housewife, who used to be afraid of her drunken husband, is now more terrified of her social worker.<sup>11</sup> This also meant the disappearance of the Oedipus complex as the state, now both father and mother, cannot ever be competed with — Adorno notes in *Minima Moralia* that what remains from Oedipus is parricide, without desire for the mother or competition with the father, parricide to efface the emancipatory possibilities contained in those patriarchal relations.<sup>12</sup> As bourgeois society disintegrated, so did the very possibility of individuality which Freudian psychoanalysis aimed at, became increasingly out of reach, utopian even. Instead, as Christopher Lasch has argued, “under siege, the self contracts to a defensive core, armed against adversity,” and hence a retreat into narcissism, while psychotherapy turned into a technique to adapt patients to society to ensure their mere survival.<sup>13</sup> Twenty years after Lasch, psychoanalyst Charles Melman would describe an age where addictive need has replaced desire, and, after him, Jean Pierre Lebrun described a psychological structure dominated by perversion.

We can thus conclude that, at least from the perspective of the Marxist appropriation of Freudian psychoanalysis by Wilhelm Reich and the Frankfurt School, the possibility of using the concept of authoritarianism in the age of Trump and to understand what this conference calls the rise of the new Right must be circumscribed. Not that the objective structures that gave rise to the authoritarian state and the authoritarian personality have disappeared, quite the opposite, but rather because the wish to provide a psycho-pathological diagnostic of Trump and Brexit voters may be wrong-headed. First and foremost, Trump is not (and cannot be) more a phenomenon of authoritarianism than Obama was, and probably less so. Obama deported more migrants than Trump, killed more civilians abroad than Trump, and Trump did not start new imperialist wars, nor did he condemn whistleblowers like Manning, Assange, or Snowden. Nor is the so-called “new Right” necessarily more authoritarian than the current Left. The past few years have been rich in pathological expressions of authoritarianism by self-proclaimed leftists. If Freudian psychoanalysis aimed at re-establishing the analyst’s ability for love and work, two central forms that freedom took in bourgeois societies and which had become mutually contradictory, self-avowed leftists in 2020 have portrayed the desire for both as “problematic,” which is Millennial lingo for “morally indefensible.”

David Faes has argued:

when millennials are confronted with the emotions surrounding desire, for which they already did not have the disposition, they further placate their anxieties with the screen-image of abuse. The childish identification with either the prey or the predator prematurely resolves what is still at play emotionally and moreover condemns the mutually transactional character of romance. Rather than recognizing romance as a social relation of mutual self-possession and exchange, millennials neatly divide men and women and project this division upon all eternity as if men only want sex and women only want relationships.<sup>14</sup>

Hence the millennial Left’s pathological fear of sex, projection of abnormal sexuality onto political enemies, and attempts at controlling the sexual lives of other leftists. Michaela Coel’s 2020 series *I May Destroy You* presents the archetypical millennial sex-panic, particularly clarifying because of its quality and sophistication. In her attempt to deal with drug-rape, the hero becomes an increasingly authoritarian Twitter *pasionaria*, denouncing and cancelling left and right. Meanwhile, all sex portrayed in the series is presented as rape, whether the characters realise it at the time or not. For example, an enjoyable, apparently spontaneous threesome appears in hindsight as possibly a carefully planned trick played by two white Italian men on the black female character. The only character who does not rape anyone is a lonely, apparently asexual white man who meditates and cares for his plants in the flat he never leaves. In this late millennial world, it is not just men, but men and white people generally, who do not just want sex, but rape, where in fact all penetration is rape, and where women only want “self-care.”

But work as well has become suspicious. The image of a child holding a placard with the words “Work Is Freedom” during an anti-lockdown protest in the spring was widely circulated among leftists, supposedly to prove the neo-Nazi allegiances of Trump voters. The words “*arbeit macht frei*” at the entrance of the Auschwitz concentration camp, meant to mock of the bourgeois revolutions by violently enforcing slave-labor, were taken by leftists as a literal pronouncement of Nazi ideology. The bourgeois emancipation from feudalism through wage-labor, the revolutionary tradition which that child inherited, was thus denounced as its antithesis, the concentration camp. Instead, leftists were content to be told by Mette Frederiksen or Jacinda Ardern to stay home like grounded children.

Further, as Cutrone put it, “In a narcissistic — authoritarian — society everyone becomes

trapped in a static and self-reinforcing identity, where the need was actually to allow the opening to non-identity of freedom: the freedom to ‘overcome oneself’ allowed by the healthy ego.”<sup>15</sup> The Millennial Left’s humorlessness and attempts to control speech, thought, and art alike, its obsession with identity categories and anger at transgression, its fascination for mysticism like astrology or authoritarian forms of Islam, or the sado-masochistic violence of its meaningless protests have long demonstrated its authoritarianism. This became particularly clear over the summer as protests against police violence became the occasion to enforce strict racial divisions and bully people into behaving like their attributed race. Black people who even dared to question whether they (individually) should vote for Joe Biden and the Democratic Party were called (in Biden’s words) “not black,” or “Uncle Toms,” and relentlessly bullied on social media until they would recant. Those like Adolph Reed Jr. who questioned the usefulness of racism as an explanatory factor for social inequality and unrest in the USA were “cancelled” and “de-platformed.”<sup>16</sup> This year also saw a swath of mostly women academics being exposed for having presented themselves as black or hispanic when everyone else in their families was considered white — and were then forced to issue tearful, self-flagellating apologies. More recently, leftists have enthusiastically participated in police efforts to identify, shame, and arrest participants in the Capitol protests. Whining and snitching have become the Left’s *modus operandi*.

Finally, the protests that took place throughout the U.S. and Europe over the summer also demand to be seen as a demand for authoritarianism. Although the protests explicitly demanded the abolition of the police, which was always a central concern of Marxism, their form, content, and consequences show that this was instead a demand for intensified policing of social life under new forms. The protests, whether peaceful or violent, did not form part of a strategy to take over the state, but rather to express demands loud enough that our overlords may hear them and act for the people. The violence that was at times exercised, pointlessly, aimed at nothing else than to provoke the police into action, a desperate attempt to have Our Father the state show tough love for his children. Those demanding the abolition of the police were quick to clarify that this meant increasing the amount of social workers and “community” policing — presumably led by self-appointed “community leaders” — as well as stricter Human Resources policies to fight against microaggressions in the workplace and have more black managers. It ultimately led to Biden’s choosing for his running mate California’s “top cop,” Kamala Harris, and his plan to start his mandate with a new, stricter set of anti-terrorism laws.

It is important to emphasize that we should not expect the Left to be less authoritarian, or not authoritarian at all, because the authoritarian personality does not result from a lack of education or a moral failing, anymore than the authoritarian state results from the moral corruption of its elites, but rather from the contradiction between bourgeois society and the industrial mode of production. Left authoritarianism is already being mobilized to political ends, for example by the Democratic Party to keep blacks, women, and young people as captive constituencies to keep electing their old, ineffective, and corrupt politicians. The only way out is through: the mobilization of authoritarianism by a socialist party towards the dictatorship of the proletariat and the overcoming of capitalism.

Were we to forget this, we would certainly have a lot of fun using Freud and Lacan to make fun of the basket of deplorables, the hicks and the rednecks who are silly enough to vote for that evil orange man or to leave the sweet embrace of the European Union, wishing them ruin, illness, and death when they refuse to vote for those who have relentlessly betrayed them for generations, or mistaking the end of neoliberalism for the end of the world — as much of the self-professed Left has done publicly and in private since 2016. Giving free reign to infantile sado-masochism sure is enjoyable, but it will not help the Left face its own responsibility in the traumatic history of the never-ending 20<sup>th</sup> century, therefore even less to take the necessary steps toward redeeming that history. That is, we should use psychoanalytic concepts not to explain away the rise of the far Right but to perceive in it, even in its most grotesque and pathological manifestations, the potential for freedom whose failure it embodies. Finally, we should also remember that if we are left with psychoanalysis it is as a desperate measure, a last resort, at least until a socialist party, an organization dedicated to the overcoming of capitalism through the dictatorship of the proletariat, makes more fruitful forms of analysis possible.

Yet we should also beware calls to action, often more akin to urges to act out. It was clear for Wilhelm Reich that the sexual revolution, the emancipation from repressive sexual morality that would also liberate humanity from its surplus authoritarianism, could only take place as part and consequence of a world revolution. Yet in his later years, as the tragic consequences of the failure of the world revolution became clearer to him, and as the Left appeared more authoritarian than ever, he came to think that the sexual revolution was to come first for the actual revolution to possibly take place.<sup>17</sup> Such a call was heard loud and clear by parts of the New Left, which dedicated itself to eradicating sexual morality and to the politicization of sexuality, to such an extent that talk of the revolution became a means towards organizing communes, taking part in orgies, and leading consciousness-raising workshops — all of which contributed to the general shift towards what Marcuse called “repressive desublimation”<sup>18</sup> and Lasch “the culture of narcissism.”<sup>19</sup> Rather, the role of a socialist party would be

to preserve and further class consciousness, that is, to make sense of the failures of the working class up to this point, its responsibility in the failures of revolutionary movements since 1848, and by extension in the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which this failure produced — a responsibility which is the counterpart of the working class’s historical task to overcome the contradictions between bourgeois society and the industrial mode of production, and to make possible unprecedented forms of freedom. In other words, the party’s task is not to act, but to maintain hope. Hopelessness and resignation led to the soldiers giving themselves up to their superiors, to Ebert ordering the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg, to the Stalinian suppression of the world revolutionary movement in order to protect “socialism in one country.” Such hopelessness and resignation were perhaps never as well expressed as in Obama’s “Yes We Can” slogan or in the Left’s enthusiasm for Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg’s apocalyptic vision.

As Omair Hussain put it:

This is the real pathology of the Left. It continually reconstitutes the domination it wants to overcome precisely on the basis of its discontents against this domination. What would it mean to overcome this pathology? Platypus has no answer. All we can do, like Freud, is attempt to provoke recognition in the patient of its pathology. Freud’s goal was to strengthen the ego of the patient through self-consciousness. If the patient could be made conscious of the pathology, perhaps that would point to its overcoming. We seek to incite the same kind of self-recognition and self-overcoming on the Left. Freud’s goal was to increase the patient’s freedom through self-mastery. Our goal is the same for the history of humanity.<sup>20</sup> **IP**

<sup>1</sup>Theodor Adorno, “Remarks on ‘The Authoritarian Personality,’” *Platypus Review* 91 (November 2016), <https://platypus1917.org/2016/11/08/remarks-authoritarian-personality-adorno-frenkel-brunswick-levinson-sanford/>.

<sup>2</sup>Peter E. Gordon, “The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump,” in *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*, eds. Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon, and Max Pensky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 51.

<sup>3</sup>Except for Chris Cutrone, “Adorno and Freud: The relation of Freudian psychoanalysis to Marxist critical social theory,” *Platypus Review* 24 (June 2010), <https://platypus1917.org/2010/06/10/adorno-and-freud/>.

<sup>4</sup>Clara Zetkin, “Lenin on the Women’s Question,” in *My Recollections of Lenin* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House).

<sup>5</sup>Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>See also Chris Cutrone, “Robots and sweatshops,” *Platypus Review* 123 (February 2020), <https://platypus1917.org/2020/02/01/robots-and-sweatshops/>.

<sup>8</sup>See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton and Co.).

<sup>9</sup>Friedrich Engels, “On Authority,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

<sup>10</sup>See Friedrich Pollock, “State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations” and Max Horkheimer, “The Authoritarian State,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (New York: Continuum).

<sup>11</sup>Theodor Adorno, “Reflections on Class Theory,” in *Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

<sup>12</sup>Theodor Adorno, “For Marcel Proust,” in *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso, 2020).

<sup>13</sup>Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.).

<sup>14</sup>David Faes, “#MeToo and the millennial sex panic,” *Platypus Review* 111 (November 2018), <https://platypus1917.org/2018/11/02/metoo-and-the-millennial-sex-panic/>.

<sup>15</sup>Chris Cutrone, “Critical authoritarianism,” *Platypus Review* 91 (November 2016), <https://platypus1917.org/2016/11/08/critical-authoritarianism/>.

<sup>16</sup>See Adolph Reed Jr., “Antiracism: a neoliberal alternative to a left” *Dialectical Anthropology* 42 (2018): 105–15; Merlin Chowkwanyun and Adolph L. Reed Jr., “Racial Health Disparities and Covid-19: Caution and Context,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 383 (2020): 201–03.

<sup>17</sup>Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986).

<sup>18</sup>Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>19</sup>Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979).

<sup>20</sup>Omair Hussain, “What does it mean to say that Platypus is the psychoanalyst of the Left?”, *Platypus Review* 115 (April 2019), <https://platypus1917.org/2019/04/01/what-does-it-mean-to-say-that-platypus-is-the-psychoanalyst-of-the-left/>.



# The Millennial Left and the Democratic Party

A response to D. L. Jacobs

Tom Canel

HERE IS A MOMENT OF IRONY for those who like to ponder such things: I read D. L. Jacobs's piece "What was the Millennial Left?"<sup>1</sup> while in the process of letting my membership in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) lapse. The irony is that if I thought his critique of the Millennial Left were applicable to DSA, I would have been more likely to renew my membership!

The two issues at play for me in my decision to let my membership lapse were firstly DSA's advocacy of a "dirty break" with the Democratic Party and secondly the increasing tendency within the DSA, if not to solidarize unreservedly with, at least to refrain from any criticism of authoritarian regimes considered anti-imperialist. The latter issue is not alluded to in Jacobs's piece, so I will not address it further here. However, DSA's support for a "dirty break" with the Democratic Party has bearing upon Jacobs's argument that the failings of the Millennial Left lie in its alleged subordination to the Democrats and in a related incapacity to establish a genuinely independent socialist party.

When we talk of the Left (of whatever generation), I take us to be focusing on the ideological (socialist) left rather than social movements (such as Black Lives Matter or transgender rights) or single-issue movements (like prison and police abolition or BDS). I also claim that the Millennial and the rest of the socialist Left in the U.S. is currently dominated by the DSA. So extensive is this domination that many residual revolutionary Marxists, if not a majority of them, have felt compelled to swallow the bitter pill of joining DSA to try and make it more revolutionary. This action is taken because DSA seems to be "the only game in town." Assuming that DSA is indeed the only game in town as far as the socialist Left is concerned, I will focus on the DSA here. While I do not presume to provide a definitive analysis of DSA as an organization, I do want to argue that recent political developments in the DSA problematize, at the very least, the claim that the Millennial Left as a whole has subordinated itself to the Democratic Party.

To ground his critique, Jacobs starts by riffing off a caricature (as he dutifully acknowledges) of a generic millennial leftist, rather than providing a detailed concrete account of actual leftists or ostensibly leftist groups. This caricature relies on a generalized impression of the Millennial Left's current state. A philosophy of history (and how the Left fits into history, understood philosophically) underlies this generalized impression. Jacobs shares the Platypus understanding of Marxism as capitalism's self-consciousness of its need to go beyond its own essential unfreedom. According to Platypus, the containment of the October Revolution, culminating in the degeneration of the Bolshevik regime and the defeat in 1919 of revolution in Germany, and the associated containment of an international revolutionary wave, led the Left to regress to a sub-Marxist consciousness. In short, the Left died. The Millennial Left, it is asserted, continues in this lamentable condition. So long as it is dead, it is claimed, the Left in the U.S. will inevitably be unable to escape subordination to the Democrats. According to this understanding, the Millennial Left, still being "dead," can be assumed to have continued to subordinate itself to the Democrats; there is therefore no need for concrete analysis of current developments within the Left to confirm this subordination. However, concrete analysis of DSA's recent development, I argue below, raises serious questions about whether DSA actually is subordinating itself to the Democratic Party as Jacobs (and Platypus) assume.

As was demonstrated by events at the August 1–8 2021 DSA National Convention, the traditional DSA position, which held that the best role for Democratic Socialists involved forging a coalition of the Democratic Party Left, is currently marginal within DSA. (Arguably, the sole concentration of support for the traditional position is within the caucus DSA North Star, largely consisting of holdovers from previous iterations of DSA. Unsurprisingly, I have been a member of DSA North Star.) Significantly, at the convention there was no discernible opposition, at least from a pro-Democratic Party perspective, to the electoral priorities resolution titled "Toward a Mass Party in the United States."<sup>2</sup> This resolution commits DSA nationally and locally to conduct its electoral interventions — which, admittedly, will often involve candidates running on the Democratic ballot line — with the clear goal of creating a mass leftist workers party, separate and independent from the Democratic Party. (A detailed outline of the underlying strategy is contained in Seth Ackerman's Jacobin article, "A Blueprint for a New Party."<sup>3</sup>) DSA's implicit orientation to the Democratic Party is to run socialists and support other "class struggle" candidates so as to polarize the Democratic Party and create the preconditions for working-class and leftist elements to break from it, creating a genuinely working-class and socialist party in the process. This strategy for creating a new workers' party is known as the "dirty break." Students of Left history will no doubt note that this bears a passing resemblance to the strategy of deep entrisism into Social Democracy advocated by Ted Grant and other Trotskyists in the decades after Trotsky urged his followers to take the "French Turn" and enter Social Democratic parties in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> I would claim that the "French Turn" and subsequent Trotskyist "deep entry" into Social Democratic Parties did not involve any subordination to Social Democracy.

It would require detailed political analysis to demonstrate that entrisism in the Democratic Party will necessarily involve political subordination that entrisism in Social Democratic parties did not.

Leading up to the convention, to the extent that there was debate in DSA about breaking with the Democratic Party, the debate revolved around *how* "dirty" the break should be — i.e., how explicit and overt should socialists be in advocating a working-class split from the Democratic Party — not around whether there should be a split at all.<sup>5</sup> It is possible, I suppose, that some might be advocating a more covert form of the dirty break as a cover for ambivalence about actually breaking with the Democratic Party. This would of course be noteworthy. I do not think that is actually happening, but even if it were, it would be equally noteworthy that the consensus among DSA members supporting a break with the Democratic Party is so strong that those who feel ambivalent about it need to dissemble.

Platypus leader Erin Hagood, speaking at a Platypus "What is the DSA?" panel at the 2018 Left Forum,<sup>6</sup> pointed out provocatively, but I think plausibly, that the "new" DSA, contrary to the self-image of at least some of its members, is not a working-class formation, but instead an expression of middle-class discontent. The discontent lies in contemporary capitalism denying young middle-class people the futures that they feel they had been promised and to which they naturally feel entitled. If true, this characterization of the DSA membership as not being working class raises the question of whether DSA would actually be capable of stimulating the kind of insurgent working-class politics to which it aspires. The answer to that question is not necessarily clear. Graduates of the highly edifying Platypus reading group will recall that the spark for Third Estate insurgency in 18<sup>th</sup>-century France came not from discontents within the Third Estate (the common people) itself, but from discontents within the First and Second Estates (the nobility and the clergy).<sup>7</sup> In his much discussed work *What is to be Done?*, Lenin argues that socialist consciousness will not emerge spontaneously from within the working class, but has to be introduced into the class through the activity of professional revolutionaries, some of whom may be from a non-proletarian background. There is historical precedent for discontent within the middle-class youth, in particular, precipitating general social unrest, including working-class insurgency. Even a predominantly middle-class composition need not necessarily doom to failure DSA's project of enabling working-class radicalization. The claim that such failure is indeed inevitable requires concrete analysis of the political conjuncture as a whole and what interventions DSA is capable of, not just the assertion of a general philosophy of history, however sophisticated it may be.

Admittedly, a pervasive vagueness within the DSA about what exactly it means by the "working class" presents a challenge to understanding the DSA's ostensible commitment to creating a workers' party out of a dirty break with the Democrats. Notwithstanding the presence of avowed Marxists decrying identity politics, one gets the impression that "working class" itself has come to be a marker of political identity rather than a socio-economic identification. Arguably, DSAers operate less with a strictly Marxist understanding of class and more with a populist understanding of the working class as the "people," incorporating all who are disadvantaged under capitalism and whose interests are opposed to those of the economic, social, and political elites who benefit from the iniquities of capitalism. The "class struggle" electoral candidates whom DSA will support would therefore be expected to consider transgender rights, for example, as an integral part of their class struggle (working class) platform. Furthermore, according to this understanding, young middle-class people who are denied the career and personal opportunities for affluence that they feel were promised if they worked hard and followed the rules, can legitimately define themselves as working class. This may drive theoretically rigorous Marxists crazy, but theoretical fuzziness does not always undermine political efficacy. Clearly though, even if actualized, the working-class party to which DSA aspires will not constitute the Leninist vanguard party of the revolutionary proletariat that some Marxists feel is required. Instead, it would be more of a radical, left-populist party espousing socialist ideas and reforms in order to lay the groundwork for socialist transformation.

While there are clusters of DSA members who do advance some form of revolutionary vanguardism, votes at the 2021 Convention showed them to be a small minority of the organization. (As consolation, DSA's Trotskyists and other aspiring Leninists might consider that they were at least a discernible presence at the Convention, which is more than could be said for advocates of building a long term democratic left coalition within the Democratic Party!) A prerequisite for DSA enabling the political developments it desires is that it develop the organizational capacity to intervene as a coherent force when opportunities present themselves. It is noteworthy therefore that, while the different caucuses and factions within DSA differ about specific organizational reforms, they all seem focused on restructuring DSA so that it can indeed intervene in a more coherent and disciplined manner politically. This is suggestive of DSA, not liquidating into, nor subordinat-

ing itself to, the Democratic Party, but seriously aspiring to political independence from it.

Despite continued predictions that it would peak and fracture multiple times over the last couple of years (either when Sanders lost in the primaries, or when Biden won against Trump for example), DSA's growth since 2016 has continued to be impressive. The organization now claims several thousand more than 90,000 members, making it the largest socialist organization in the U.S. since the Communist Party in the 1930s and 1940s. However, there is some evidence that an inevitable (temporary, DSAers hope) pause in this rapid growth is, at last, at hand. The chief task in the next couple of years may be one of consolidation and maintenance of membership levels. One senses that DSA's leadership, as ideologically diverse as it may be, agrees that increasing DSA's capacity for political effectiveness in pursuing its strategic aims is key to membership retention and future growth. The possibility remains (as I fear is the case) that any break with the Democratic Party is not viable, or that (as I also fear) it would have problematic political side-effects if accomplished. But with regard to the *Platypus Review* piece to which I am responding, my point is that what is arguably the core of the Millennial Left, the DSA, seems intent on not subordinating itself to the Democratic Party and is taking steps as an organization to avoid that outcome. Therefore, the argument that the Millennial Left as whole is so subordinated, needs, at the very least, more fleshing out than is provided in the article as it stands. **IP**

<sup>1</sup> D. L. Jacobs, "What Was the Millennial Left?," *Platypus Review* 137 (June 2021), <<https://platypus1917.org/2021/06/01/what-was-the-millennial-left/>>.

<sup>2</sup> All of the resolutions proposed for the 2021 DSA convention can be found at <<https://convention2021.dsausa.org/2021-dsa-convention-resolutions/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Seth Ackerman, "A Blueprint for a New Party," *Jacobin*, November 8, 2016, <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/11/bernie-sanders-democratic-labor-party-ackerman/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ted Grant, "Problems of Entrism," originally published in March of 1959, <<http://www.tedgrant.org/archive/grant/1959/03/entrisism.htm>>.

<sup>5</sup> See Eric Blanc, "We Should Focus on Scaling Up Working-Class Power, Not Debating the Dirty Break," *The Call*, August 6, 2021, <<https://socialistcall.com/2021/08/06/dsa-dirty-break-electoral-strategy/>>. See also Nick French, "Let's Recommit to Building an Independent Party", *The Call*, August 2, 2021, <<https://socialistcall.com/2021/08/02/lets-recommit-to-building-an-independent-party/>>.

<sup>6</sup> The panel discussion "What is the DSA?" was held on June 6, 2018, at Long Island University in New York during the Left Forum 2018 conference. Video of the event is available online at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiWZEMkTqk>>.

<sup>7</sup> See Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès's famous 1789 pamphlet, "What is the Third Estate?," the full text of which is available online at <<https://pages.uoregon.edu/dluebke/301ModernEurope/Sieyes3dEstate.pdf>>.

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## “Latin American Trotskyism,” cont. from page 2

party in Cuba was called the Partido Socialista Popular, which had supported Batista and was then greatly discredited before the masses. The Posadas group remained independent as the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (another classic name for Trotskyist parties), until the time when Che Guevara left and the Castro apparatus took full control, mainly through Raúl Castro (another KGB agent, speaking on my own behalf), and imprisoned the *posadista* revolutionary party. They turned it clandestine and destroyed it. *Posadistas* debated with Che (where Che lost) about what was the necessary and possible industrial development on an island. Nobody thought of building a missile industry, but an industry that would have led to development and that would have prevented the famine that the Cuban people suffer from today. This was the development supported by the workers of the city and the countryside, for sustaining a life and not having to live on the Soviet or Venezuelan subsidy, leading to famine in special periods.

**FSA:** Regarding Partido Obrero, of which you are a member: there was a split within the party in 2019. What was the cause? Why do the Trotskyist parties tend towards sectarianism? But, on the other hand, Partido Obrero is now part of the Frente de Izquierda (Leftist Front). What do you think of the agglomeration of the Left under one flag? Do you all share the same historical consciousness, the same goal? And what is that common goal?

**AR:** As for being sectarian: Trotskyism has never overcome this since 1933, except in the U.S. for a period (the Socialist Workers Party), England (under *The Militant*, a massive newspaper that sold hundreds of thousands of copies and was active in the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress), France (which has an enormous tradition with the Revolutionary Communist League, which today is the New Anti-Capitalist Party), and in Argentina. Trotskyism could only take root in those four western countries. The greatest militancy obviously existed in the Soviet Union, but that was over 70 years ago.

Ho Chi Minh massacred us in Vietnam, where Trotskyism really had a strong insertion through deputies and leaders of the Vietnamese Communist Party in South Vietnam and Saigon. Very early on the Left Opposition in China was liquidated, which had a lot of influence in Shanghai and Guangzhou before the Long March. The Chinese Communist Party (which has just turned 100 years old) had a lot of roots in working-class cities, although it was not a sympathizer of the Left Opposition, the seed of the Fourth International.

In the Partido Obrero, in Argentina, we called to vote in the revocatory plebiscite for the permanence of Hugo Chávez; in the first election

of Evo Morales in 2005, for Morales. Now, in the second round, we called to vote for Castillo in Peru. We are perceived as sectarian, but I do not perceive myself that way. I have been an elected union leader for 38 years; I have always been elected on more than one list; I have won and I have lost, but I have been a union leader for 38 years. I feel integrated into the workers' movement, the women's movement, the youth movement, the environmental movement. We have a mass development policy and I can't even tell you the influence we have on the movement of the unemployed and impoverished in the country.

The Left Front is an exception, I am not going to deny it. It has been ten years now and that does not exist in history from 1933 to date. There is no such precedent in the history of the Fourth International for four parties claiming to be from the International being together in a political front for such a long period. That is unprecedented, sadly! There are parties following this tendency, like the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in France, or the Socialism and Freedom Party in Brazil (PSOL). But there everyone does whatever he wants, says whatever he wants. Here we have a political front where each organization maintains its program, its profile, its local partisans, but has a front to act on the plane of combative trade unionism, in the class-based labor movement; to act on the unemployed through the Unidad Piquetera (protesters); to act in the women's movement; and to act electorally. Unfortunately, there is more focus on elections than on the concrete field of the daily class struggle. It is the only political front in the known political world (including Asia) that maintains a program that proposes a workers' government. This is the vulgar way, Lenin said, of expressing the dictatorship of the proletariat, which we do not deny. That is what makes the hegemonic media and the rest of the Left perceive us as sectarian: we continue to believe that the dictatorship of the proletariat, as Lenin put it, is the essential difference from social democracy. Workers' government or workers' and peasants' government are the vulgar, popular ways of saying the dictatorship of the proletariat. We do not hide it, this is how we present it in our press.

**FSA:** Reading the daily and weekly press of the *Prensa Obrera* (the press of Partido Obrero), it gave me the feeling that there is a constant struggle for reforms in benefit of the workers, while the revolutionary character of the party appears in the background. What is the relationship between reform and revolution for Partido Obrero, which so much concerned the Second International? Did the revolution become a utopia, just part of the discourse?

**AR:** The revolution is a necessity! Not a utopia. That the 1%, as it was said at Occupy Wall Street, owns 50–70% of the GDP (depending on the country you prefer), shows that a small group of owners of the means of production monopolize world wealth. Not only is the revolution a necessity, but the world revolution is a necessity for the development of civil and material forces. Not in Argentina or Denmark, in the world! And there is nothing better than the discussion of vaccines that exists throughout the world today to explain this. Look at the confrontation that Merkel had with the laboratories and their privatization of public goods (such as knowledge) that are financed by public funds, that is, by taxpayers. Tax systems are regressive. In other words, it is the working people of the city and the countryside who finance the discovery of vaccines. That technological power that humanity has accumulated over millions of years is owned by a few. We face a fact of nature (without delving into whether it is or not) and the owners of that patent, of that productive good, are the ones who defend an oligopoly that decides who gets vaccinated and who doesn't. This is the concrete demonstration, in 2021, of why the world revolution is a necessity.

For Trotskyists it is a settled discussion between the minimum or the maximum program. The Bolsheviks were known as the maximalists at the time you quote, from 1917–19. They used to tell the socialists, "you follow the minimum program and talk about socialism on festive days." That was Lenin's reply to the German Social Democracy. Our program is called "The Death Agony of Capitalism" (also known as "The Transitional Program"). We believe that the immediate demands of the masses are what should leverage and unleash the revolution. There is no other way out, hence the importance for us of the program of the "Left Front and Workers-Unity" in Argentina, to carry out that workers' program. This program is not only for festivities, or every two years when voting, but for every day to build a revolutionary organization that considers the seizure of power. We say that clearly. Now, the immediate need of the masses cannot be neglected. Because if we neglect, for example, evictions, mortgages, or even in Denmark, the cyclical crises in pig production or the massacre of fur animals last year; if we are not in the environmental fight for climate change, we would be absent from the class struggle. Everyone has their opinion in that fight, ours is one and yours will be another; we are democratic to the maximum in that the mass movement is the one that resolves, to which we provide guidance. This does not come from Trotskyism, but from Marx. In the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* he says it clearly: "we communists have no interest other than that of the proletariat as a whole. We are only, in this movement, the most resolute fraction for struggle." That was the tradition of the First, Second, Third and that maintains the Fourth International, with the new elaboration, or update, that we believe in the achievement of transitional demands to carry out the political struggle. **IP**



# Latin American Trotskyism

## An interview with Antonio Rosello

Francisco Sanchez Acosta

On July 13, 2021, Francisco Sanchez Acosta interviewed Argentinian professor Antonio Rosello. Rosello has been a militant leftist and trade-union leader for almost half a century, with vast experience in the Trotskyist Left in Argentina.



Cover of *El Combatiente* No. 96 (1973)

**Francisco Sanchez Acosta:** How do you remember your first years as a leftist militant? Who were your mentors and through which organizations did you receive the legacy of the Left?

**Antonio Rosello:** I had a tumultuous journey. I would define myself as a younger brother of the generation of 68: May 68 in France, the Prague Spring, and the Cordobazo in Argentina. I started as a militant in February 1973. My father was concerned that my ideas were somewhat right-wing, so in the summer of 1972–73 he provided me with literature by the anarchist Peter Kropotkin and put me in contact with what was the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina. He had also been there as a young man and that is how I started as a militant anarchist.

It was a very intense experience. I was active in the neighborhood of La Boca, in the city of Buenos Aires. One of my teachers there was Diego Abad de Santillán, an exile from the CNT-FAI (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo-Federación Anarquista Ibérica) for the anti-fascist struggle in Spain, staying in Argentina. He returned to Spain in 1975 after Franco's death. I was dedicated to neighborhood and factory-gate militancy. At the age of 13 I had an intense life of militancy, reading and fraternization with the working-class sectors. The neighborhood of La Boca is where the first socialist deputy in America, Alfredo Palacios, was elected through the constituency in 1904. The neighborhood had deep left-wing roots. I fraternized with the people of the Frente de Liberación de Cabo Verde; with the Bagley workers (one of the largest food and cookie factories in history in Argentina up to that moment); I went to the factory gates and the places where workers met to eat or do any kind of cultural activities. All of this was close to Constitución train station, which is one of the largest railway terminals in the country, especially for popular sectors.

I was involved in militant anarchism for two years, but I was concerned about their economic analysis and I asked, as a gift for my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1974, for Marx's *Capital*. Reading *Capital* on my own (also studying bourgeois economics) made me quickly realize that Marxism had a potency, in the polemic with anarchism, which was much greater. Anarchism is rare in its configuration. The leadership isn't non-existent, but the debate and passion about what to do tomorrow is much more inorganic than in the organizations that we claim to be Marxist.

This was a time of great passion. I always tell the younger generations: we saw countries falling, not just that a strike was won! In the case of the fight against the Portuguese colonies, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Portugal itself (with the longest fascist dictatorship in history from 1912 to 1974) fell. Franco and *franquismo* went down; they were tremendous struggles. We had the French May, the Prague Spring, the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam and its reunification after defeating three empires (the French, the Japanese, and the North American) throughout a revolutionary war that lasted four decades. We were in an ascent of the class struggle in which conquests were "normal."

With my coming to Marxism I became a militant in the high school student movement. I was going to an elite school, a "pre-university" one. Currently there are about 100 such colleges, but at that time there were far fewer and they depended on national universities. One of the top schools that Argentina has is called the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, where I did my secondary studies. There the political effervescence was tremendous. Of approximately 1,500 students, 500 had some political adherence to the Left (between adherents and more or less active militants). We were the organization of the entire secondary movement of the federal capital of the Argentine Republic: the city of Buenos Aires.

There were three sections: first, the reformist led by the Partido Comunista Argentino. I am not saying this in a derogatory sense. At the university this party called itself reformist, using as a banner the university reform of 1918. The second section was the "*foquistas*:" the armed organizations, mainly Montoneros and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo

(ERP). And finally, the sections of the Trotskyist left, which were very small at that time. The legalization of the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores transformed that current into the only independent candidacy against Perón in his election in September 1973. This was my daily political struggle aged 14–15 years old. The militancy in the Colegio Nacional was an invaluable political training school for any adolescent. Today, unfortunately, there is nowhere in the world that I am aware of where people want to debate with each other based on arguments and theoretical frameworks. Social networks impose a rhythm fixed in fleeting images or 280 characters. By all means, but it should exist alongside honest debate and confrontation of ideas!

After Perón's death, the Montoneros decided to go underground. The ERP maintained its armed struggle and its *foquist* strategy. It was really attractive for the petty-bourgeois sectors (as was my case) and the youth to understand that our situation could not be solved through voting. On his return, Perón was the political and organizational leader of the AAA (the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina), which persecuted artists and intellectuals and has more than a thousand deaths to its credit. My first burials of comrades who were killed in combat or repressed by the military or paramilitary state forces were back in 1975.

Saigon fell in April 1975. We all went out to celebrate when the photo on the cover of the Argentine newspapers was a marine hanging from the wheel of a helicopter going to the aircraft carrier, fleeing the embassy. In that climate, Perón came and organized the repression. He organized the "social pact." This pact granted "the metallurgical homeland" (the Metalworkers' Union, UOM) to the trade-union bureaucracy, which was the powerhouse of the Argentine industry that existed at that time. The industrial unions were the strongest. The bureaucracy had strict control, with its own armed guards to prevent class currents that wanted to break the social pacts and class collaboration from going to elections within the unions. Every trade-union election literally ended in gunfire.

There was a massive sympathy, especially, I insist, in the petty-bourgeois sectors, that we had already tried democracy and it failed. What triumphed in the world were the armed national liberation movements, with one addition: fascism was also a present thing for us. In 1973, when democracy triumphed in Argentina, the Chilean Popular Unity government fell due to a fascist coup. There was also a coup in Uruguay: their parliament got closed and the armed forces took power with the elected president of the Colorado party, named Bordaberry, as their puppet. All this happened simultaneously; convulsions were the normal state of life. It is not like today in Argentina, where a poverty level of 50% of the population means that in the face of pressing material needs and immediate demands, it is important to constantly know the value of the U.S. dollar or if the meat price rose.

In 1975 there was a general strike in the country: the first general strike with mobilizations that lasted more than a week against a Peronist government since 1945, in this case that of Isabel Perón. There had been a violent economic shock given the world crisis triggered in 1971 when the United States abandoned convertibility, which deepened with the devaluation of the dollar with the oil-price pact. Everyone blamed OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) for this crisis.

At that time, I founded an independent group with three or four companions which was called the Agrupación de Base Túpac Amaru. We tried to achieve unity, in our adolescent utopianism, of the revolutionary organizations. Specifically, the ERP and the Montoneros. We were not significant within the social and political movements of the time.

When the *coup d'état* of 1976 took place, the situation was unfeasible and unbearable. Under the ERP's slogan, "Argentines to arms," I joined the PRT (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores). At that moment I discovered Trotskyism. For a while, the PRT was the Argentine section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International based in Paris, whose biggest influence was Ernest Mandel. Although I already knew Trotsky, I discovered another type of reading of Trotskyism. I ended up moving away from the PRT due to purges after Santucho's death and my differences with the leadership taken by Gorriarán Merlo. He was an Argentine military commander who executed Somoza in Paraguay, but for me at that time he was an agent of the Soviet KGB. I differed with the tactics and strategy that the new leadership of the PRT had taken, and I walked away. By mid-1977 the PRT had disappeared, after being beheaded in the winter of 1976 with the deaths of Santucho, Mena, and Urteaga.

I continued to be a clandestine militant and joined what is now the Partido Obrero, formerly known as Política Obrera (as it was called at that time). I was also active in the students' movement, but with differences with the leadership. There was a split in the Organizing Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International led by Pierre Lambert in Paris with his Internationalist Communist Organization, and I was expelled from the Partido Obrero. I continued to be a militant within the Lambert faction in Argentina, forming a small group with about 30 comrades who carried forward the banner of the Fourth International.

Those were my first four and a half years of militancy, from 13 to 18 years old.

**FSA:** The Fourth International is an organization with a direct Trotskyist heritage. Perhaps

you do not agree with the reading that I am going to present, but for me the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a regressive one. The international revolution of 1917–19 failed, severely conditioned by the capitulation of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) to Bonapartism and reformism. This failure, in a way, opened the door to a century of reaction, in which the orthodox Marxist Left was largely liquidated. My understanding is that Trotsky founded the Fourth International with a feeling of emergency, of immediate necessity for the proletarian revolution, very different from the foundation of the First or Second International. I do not think he would have imagined that the International would continue to exist in 2021. However, the International today continues to offer a certain historical continuity, as if this has not been broken. What impact on the Argentine left has the Fourth International had throughout its history, through Nahuel Moreno and *posadismo*, to date? What is your opinion of the International today?

**AR:** I have a different outlook and I am not going to abuse Trotsky, but I clearly differ. Perhaps it's a nuance. To put it in popular terms for both Europe and Latin America, I'll make use of Eric Hobsbaw'n's "short 20<sup>th</sup> century."

To begin with, for me the 20<sup>th</sup> century was very progressive, not regressive, and contradictory to the era of "wars and revolutions" (Lenin). That historical stage was still in force, although it is a century that had a "midnight of history," as Victor Serge, a great Belgian union leader and communist, said. As you presented it, from 1917 to 1919 the biggest offensive of the proletariat in Europe took place. Evidently the proletariat could not surpass, as a class, its leadership, which it had concretely built. It is easy to criticize the German Social Democratic Party with retrospective hindsight, but the construction of the SPD, according to Lenin, was not surpassed even by the Bolshevik Party. It was a mass party of immense penetration in the midst of Bismarck's anti-socialist laws. The newspaper *Vorwärts* would arrive at your door every morning or week (depending on the period). It reached more than 100 regional newspapers. Even though it was subsequently bureaucratized and co-opted by the upper layer of the proletariat (hence the name of the labor aristocracy), the construction of the SPD as a mass party has not yet been surpassed by the working class.

When the SPD supported the war credits, Lenin read it in the newspapers in Switzerland and thought that it must have been faked by the imperialists, that it could not have happened. It was something that surprised everyone, except Rosa Luxemburg. Trotsky said during the First World War that "we internationalists fitted into a couch." Lenin gave a lecture in Geneva two weeks before the Russian revolution in February where he explicitly addressed the "young" because "we old men" would not see the revolution. In 1914 he thought that the SPD's betrayal was a forgery of the German secret services, and by 1917 he thought that he would not see the revolution. But what matters is reality, not the scheme. Lenin has a phrase — one could even say Christian — that states that "Marxism is all-powerful because it is the truth." But, why is it the truth? Because Marxism is a method of analysis for action, not a certification by historians.

From 1917 to 1919 the great offensive took place, which social democracy and imperialism managed to paralyze. Lenin, Trotsky, and Keynes are the only three who, when the Versailles treaty is signed, think that it is useless and that it will unleash another war or revolution due to the intolerable oppression of the German people through unpayable and uncollectible war reparations. The defeat of the German Revolution only occurred in 1923, not in 1919. This is when hyperinflation happens; Hitler's failed coup in Munich, and so on. A process of regression begins. This setback inevitably impacts the Soviet Union, which by 1922 had had eight years of external warfare and civil war. They had exhausted their material strength. The best leadership of the proletariat had died on the battlefields or had died of typhus, or other diseases. The economy had to be liberalized and a big step backwards was taken through the New Economic Policy (NEP). That was the way Lenin posed it to the Russian workers, explaining the setback since the international revolution was receding and they were blockaded and out of supplies. I grant you that from 1923 to 1933 there is a setback (not without contradictions, like the failed Chinese Revolution), but there is a discussion in the ranks of the Left about "what needs to be done."

In 1933 the German Communist Party surrendered to Hitler without a fight. General Secretary Thälmann was imprisoned without having armed bodies to defend him or going into hiding, which is not a minor fact. It had already happened with Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht, Jr.: for not going underground and into exile they were massacred by the Freikorps. This had already been learned in the revolution: having the top leadership of the party exposed to Hitler is a criminal act in itself, even though Thälmann is the victim of his own policy. It is this night that Serge (the Belgian) refers to as "the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the midnight of history." This event also had an impact on the USSR, with the expulsion of Trotsky and the Moscow Trials. But still, life is richer than any schema. The class struggle does not stop even in the concentration camps.

From the German defeat at Stalingrad in 1943 up to 1979 there had been a tremendous rise in the labor movement. (During this rise I was the younger brother, as I told you, of the 68 generation.) So much so that half of the emerging nations and half of the world's population lived under workers' states. 17 new workers' states were built. The critique of Trotskyism is, specifically: why are there 17 workers' states? Why didn't China and the USSR create a single market and an international division of labor? Why were the leadership of the USSR and China

fighting instead of creating a single market and facing in a better position the development of the productive, material forces? Because the ruling Maoist and Stalinist bureaucracies (or two Stalinisms for us) are two faces of the same politics. What makes the USSR explode? The restorationist forces: these bureaucracies are appropriating most of the countries' GDP, leading to a deformed industrialization in Eastern Europe, focusing on the service of Moscow and its military needs. They could not achieve the necessary structure in a world in which, post WWII, almost 50% of the world's GDP belonged to the United States. And what are the Communist parties doing in Western Europe?

In France, the Maquis were disarmed under the slogan "one state, one police." The largest party in the West was the Italian one of Togliatti, who had a city in the USSR called Togliatigrad because he obtained the fiat patents to produce cars there. He handed over the power and even accepted a referendum to decide if the monarchy would return! Even when he had the weapons in his hands and Mussolini had been executed. Also, the Greeks had the arms supply cut off and were massacred by the British army. All this happened under postwar democracy in Western Europe!

From these currents, cells were rebuilt within the Fourth International, Michel Pablo being its main leader. There was a very severe problem with the North American section, which was the most powerful in the legal period. The Soviet section, that used to be the largest, was massacred between the Moscow Trials and the war. In the U.S. there was the Socialist Workers Party which had at its head the union leader J.P. Cannon, who dedicated himself to building a party in a single country instead of building the International. He had the same fundamental deviation that Stalinism undertook. The reconstruction of the International after the war was in the hands of, specifically, the Europeans. In particular, the French. They, in the face of the triumph of the revolution, of Tito's separatist maneuvers from Stalin, of the seizure of power in China in the 1949 revolution, saw that they were obviously wrong, because in the *Transitional Program* (which is the foundational program of the Fourth International) Trotsky says that "the least likely variant is that petty-bourgeois parties, including Stalinism, will come to the seizure of power." Michel Pablo said that they were wrong there since that was not the least likely variant but the one that actually happened, which is why he promoted a new strategy of "*sui generis* entryism" (as he officially calls it) in the communist parties. We believed that this policy was liquidationist. Early on, the French section, with Lambert at its head, confronted this policy of the world leadership of the Fourth International and in 1953 the Socialist Workers Party launched an open letter to Trotskyists around the world. The International is torn apart into the International Secretariat, in the hands of Pablo (where Posadas directed the Latin American secretariat), and the International Committee, in which Nahuel Moreno organized, creating the Secretariado Latinoamericano del Trotskismo Ortodoxo (SLATO). SLATO confronted Posadas, who was a delusional person (like many Argentines) and thought that UFOs exist. These UFOs had tremendous technology, which is why they must be socialist. There was a very famous long-term newspaper in Argentina called *Proletarian Voice*, which my generation called "*Planetary Voice* because of its intergalactic political concept. The problem is that they ended up supporting the Peronist right at the same time they supported the communist parties.

Moreno's journey was shakier. From having a very *gorila* (anti-Peronist) position in 1945, he went on to join one of the satellite parties of Peronism: the Partido Socialista de la Revolución Nacional, where a section of the Argentine social democracy had converted to support for bourgeois nationalism. They came to control the Federación Bonaerense through their newspaper *La Verdad* (many Trotskyist newspapers in the world are called *Pravda*, following Lenin's newspaper). Moreno performed entryism there and obtained control of the Federación Bonaerense with a policy of zigzags toward Peronism; he supported the positive and criticized the negative, but did not seek class independence, workers' democracy, etc. Moreover, he deepened that policy during what in Argentina is known as "the stage of resistance," from 55 to 59. A group called Palabra Obrera had as its motto, "Under the discipline of General Perón." Nahuel Moreno also put himself "under the discipline of General Perón." But, as we are all sensitive to the class struggle (unless you belong to a dogmatic religious sect), the Cuban Revolution also had an impact on Morenism, introducing the issue of *foquismo*. Moreno's group became divided. Its second leader, Vasco Bengochea, was actively militant for *foquismo*. Then, the entire Moreno group was also driven towards a variant of *foquismo*.

The Popular Indo-American Revolutionary Front (which Santucho had led) and what was left of Palabra Obrera unified into the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, which became the section of the Fourth International in Argentina (until its division and the foundation of the ERP). The factions were PRT *La Verdad*, of Moreno, and PRT *El Combatiente*, the official organ of Santucho's central committee. Then, before the Cordobazo and the legal opening, Moreno merged his PRT group *La Verdad* with the Argentine Socialist Party (led by a man named Juan Carlos Coral) and founded the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores, which is the translation into Spanish of Socialist Workers Party.

What was contradictory about Posadas? In Cuba he supported the revolution, he was actively militant for it, but he maintained the independence of his party from both the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement as well as from the Cuban Communist Party. Why? Due to the fusion of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement with Stalinism: the Stalinist